

THE FRASER-FLAXMAN FIGHT.

BY FRANK CONDON.

How You Can Occasionally Win on a Horse
That Doesn't Finish Within a Mile of the Post.



NE thing on the face of the earth that defies logic and sneers at reason is the firm belief of a street-car conductor that he is as good as a railroad fireman.

There was the case of Peter Flaxman. The other man was David Fraser, and the girl was Nora Feely, by which admission is established immediately the three sides of the human triangle; and while all such geometric figures promise and produce action of one sort or another, this particular triangle began to bat over 300 from the very first.

In Toledo, Ohio, a thriving Western metropolis, where they have all-night street-cars every fifteen minutes and an owl lunch-wagon exactly like every other owl lunch-wagon on the North American continent, the "union deepo" is an institution, coddled by the residents in kind words and profaned by the stranger.

Toledoans speak of it cheerfully, and you expect to find it on the main thoroughfare, surrounded by girdles of electric lights, swathed in

banners, and one step from your hotel. On the contrary—yes, on the emphatic contrary—the "union deepo" is chastely snuggled in the bosom of a depression that had once done duty as a self-respecting swamp, miles away from the teeming, roaring city, leagues beyond where you expect to find it, doing its best to be a pigs-in-clover enigma.

Miss Feely was twenty years old the night of the car-barn fire. That was the biggest event in Toledo's history, and it was very exciting. You will have no trouble in placing the date, so you can see that Miss Feely is still quite a young woman, and she is every bit as entrancing this minute as she was that night.

She watched the flames from the top of Peter Flaxman's car, which had been converted into a "Seeing Toledo Burn" vehicle, in special honor of the occasion.

During that terrible visitation of the fire fiend, young Mr. Fraser stoked anthracite into a pony engine in the yards—a snorting, hustling little four-wheel Brooks, with the disposition of a Mis-



NORA FEELY.

souri mule and an abrupt habit of throwing a man off his feet every time the brakes were applied. Mr. Fraser had reason to believe Miss Feely was watching the fire. Furthermore, he was convinced that Mr. Flaxman was somewhere near her, and the double thought peeved him in a most acid way.

"I don't wish him any bad luck," communed Mr. Fraser, passing in the coal, "but I hope he's under the next wall that falls. She makes me tired, anyhow. Chasin' around with a bell-ringin', nickel-chasing shrimp that can't keep his ears clean! She ought to have better sense."

Whereupon Pony No. 111 bucked violently into a Pullman, and tried to push the water-gage down Mr. Fraser's throat.

One day, six months before the fire, Davy Fraser finished washing his face in the roundhouse, preparatory to buying some chewing-gum in the waiting-room. Davy hadn't chewed gum in fourteen years; but there was a new girl behind the counter, and she looked like a dream come true. Davy had seen her for the first time in the morning, and his long-lost love for gum abruptly returned.

At the gum counter, and partly hiding it, was a man in a blue uniform. When Davy strolled in through the clicking telegraph office, the man in the uniform was buying gum, and indulging in what appealed to Davy as some very loose and infantile conversation about the color of eyes, and how brown eyes always looked nicer than blue eyes.

Miss Feely had brown eyes—very brown eyes; the sort of brown eyes that make their owner's telephone number stand out in a man's memory like a lighthouse. Davy had always hated Peter Flaxman; but until he saw Peter talking to Miss Feely, that bright afternoon, he never realized how intense a loathing one man may have for another.

There he was, a blue Peter in good sooth. Blue uniform, blue cap, nickel buttons, badge, gloves and all, and talking to Miss Feely for all the world like a silly magpie, when no doubt she was interminably bored and irritated.

"Have you got any Blood Red gum, miss?" asked Davy politely. "Hallo."

He addressed the last word to Mr. Flaxman, coldly and frigidly.

"Hallo, Davy," answered Peter brightly. "I haven't seen you since that night you came near being arrested. How you ever got out of that scrape beats me."

Miss Feely looked politely interested. "I haven't any Blood Red," she said in the pause that followed Peter's pleasant remark; "but we sell Tulip's Heart. It's very good gum. Would you like some Tulip's Heart?"

"That's the very name I was trying to think of. I always chew that kind. Gimme fifty cents' worth."

Davy peeled off the tinfoil and inserted a wedge in his mouth.

"Ain't you chewing tobacco no more?" asked Mr. Flaxman with interest.

"I never did chew tobacco," responded Davy tartly. "Your motorman's calling you."

It was even so. Peter smiled brightly at Miss Feely, who had seemingly been paying slight attention.

"So long, Miss Feely," he said. "I'll see you the next trip."

"Do you know Flaxman?" asked Davy, when the conductor had gone.

"Not very well. He comes in to see me when his car gets here. He's a nice man, I think. He's very fond of gum. Are you?"

"I live on gum," replied Davy. "What was he saying to you about brown eyes when I come up?"

"Oh, nothing. He was just talking like all you men talk. Aren't you the fireman out in the yards?"

"I fire the switch-engine," admitted Davy. "I get a job runnin' before long. Do you like street-car conductors?"

Miss Feely smiled one of those quick smiles that start and end in the same second.

"I don't know," she answered. "I like men if I like them, regardless of what they do for a living. Do you like girls who work in railroad-station waiting-rooms, selling gum to firemen who chew tobacco?"

She leaned her rounded elbows upon the glass case and looked Davy in the eye. He grinned.

"Sure I do. But now, listen. I ain't got a thing against street-car conductors. They're generally dead-beats or crooks of some sort or other, and they usually drink like a fish and never pay their debts, and they never have a decent home over their heads, and they're not refined, and they'd probably steal the pennies off a dead man's eyes. But, outside of that, they're all right. Taking them as a class, they're all right, outside of the trifling exceptions I mentioned.

cover a capable switch-engine shinnying around the yards, and during most of the day you'll see me chucking coal into her.

"Every now and then I'm coming in to buy some of this here Tulip gum, and eventually I believe we'll get to know each other; and, in the course of time, I'm going to ask you definitely to come to a dance with me, because if there ever was a swell little dancer in Toledo, the same is yours, etc., etc."



"I'M GOING TO ASK YOU TO MARRY ME TO-NIGHT."

How long since you knew this Flaxman fellow?"

"I began this job at seven-thirty this morning," laughed Miss Feely. "I met Mr. Flaxman at seven thirty-two, and he's been in to see me at the end of every trip, so far. His car has to wait outside for ten minutes each time."

"Do you ever go to dances?" asked Davy, changing the subject easily.

"Very often. I love to dance."

"If you ever get to know me better, d'ye suppose I might have the honor?"

"We'll see, later on."

"Well, if you look out through that last window once in a while, you'll dis-

A customer interrupted the flow of conversation, and Davy walked forth into the summer-night's air smiling upon the rich and the poor alike.

Miss Feely was the sole support of a large and expensive wardrobe, and, incidentally, she won the bread for a timid little mother. There was nothing brilliant about her except her eyes, and nothing pretty except—well, her whole sweet self. In Toledo, a girl must work for a living or get married. No Toledo girl has ever tried out the first system to its fullest extent, and marriage is as common as conversation.

Miss Feely had no particular aspira-

tions, ideals, or ambitions, but she liked good-looking men who were properly introduced, and occasionally she became acquainted with other men in unconventional ways—just as she came to know Davy Fraser and Peter Flaxman.

Peter was a good-looking chap. So was Davy. Peter made a fair income, and so did Davy. Peter had a gift of gab and a sweet way of talking nonsense to a girl, and Davy lost points on this count. But the triangle started out easily, and made good time from the beginning.

It was Peter who first leaped the bounds of restraint and carried off the girl to an ice-cream social in Walbridge Park. It was Peter who drove himself into a book-store and bought a bundle of books, the contents of which were pure

Greek to him. They had nice covers, and they made an acceptable gift. It was Peter who learned to buy flowers now and then, to mind the holidays with an appropriate greeting, to tip his hat frequently. And whatever he did, Davy came in behind with a mild sort of imitation.

Davy was no ladies' man, but he was a mighty good fireman. He could tell the steam-pressure without looking at the gage, but he couldn't make a pretty speech to save his soul. As a social light, he was unlit.

Now and then, after all three had become pals—all except Davy and Peter—the fireman would invite the girl out for a moonlight ride on the lake. He might take her to a summer-theater show, or he might drop in at the little cottage

up on Western Avenue and idle away a few hours without making any particular effort to be entertaining or amusing.

One night Davy sat in the big Morris chair, staring at Nora and wondering how it would feel to be able to ask her if she had put out the cat and locked the back door. He sat up suddenly under the weight of a stray thought and propounded:

"Say, Nora, do you like Peter Flaxman better than me?"

Nora turned her brown eyes on him in mild surprise.

"I've often wondered," she said gravely. "It's been bothering me lately more than ever. I've sat up with that particular thought more than one night. Peter is a fine chap. So are you. Neither one of you has made violent love to me; but I'm not blind, and I can see



"I NEVER DID CHEW TOBACCO," RESPONDED DAVY TARTLY.
"YOUR MOTORMAN'S CALLING YOU."



"THEN EVERYBODY CLUTCHED WITH THEIR ARMS, WRISTS, KNEES, AND FINGERS AS THE PASSIONLESS STEEDS SHOT DOWN WITH A METALLIC ROAR."

that you like me. Peter asked me to marry him last night."

"As usual," grunted Davy. "He's in ahead of me again. Well, I may be a trailer, but I'm consistent. So I'm going to ask you to marry me to-night. I don't care what you told Pete; but if you said you would marry him, I'm going to look him up this bright summer's eve and knock his block off."

"I didn't say I would marry him. I told him he would have to wait."

"That sounds better. Now, what are you going to tell me?"

"Same answer, Davy. I can't decide. I wish I could, because somebody is going to get the worst of this, and I don't want to hurt either you or Pete. I presume one of you will be hurt."

"One of us will, unless I marry you, Nora. If you have any large sums of money around the house, go and get a bet down that one of us will be hurt, and his initials will be P. F. Say! Can you see me on the curb watching you and him trail into church—him in a waiter's dress suit and you all dressed up?"

"Nix. I'll be on the curb maybe, but I'll carry a dynamite bomb, and I'll touch it off right after some one gives Pete away, taking great care to have it remove him from earth. No. I've been reading the cards, and they say you're going to lose the Feely end of your name and adorn yourself with the pleasing name of Fraser."

Nora laughed, and so did her small mother. The mother always sat in on these little affairs, and Davy wasn't the least embarrassed.

"How much do you make now?" asked Nora. "I'm not mercenary; but it's nice to know the facts, in case of fire."

"Hundred and thirty, counting overtime, and I'll do better when I start running. We can get married to-morrow and have a honeymoon next year."

"Next year I'll answer that. But, remember this. I'm ready to marry either you or Peter. I can't settle it because I can't, and that's all there is to it. Things will have to go on in the same way until something happens."

Nothing happened to sway the situation from its perfect poise. Peter and Nora were fast friends, and Davy and Nora were fast friends. True, Peter escorted the girl to frequent social events, but Davy trailed along about the same as ever; so the general average was undisturbed.

Even a fireman can become jealous. Davy was jealous. Not only that; he was angry, and threatened Peter with bodily harm, whereat Peter laughed. And when the grand ball of the Fourth Ward Democratic Club was given at the Casino, Peter slipped one over on Davy for the thousandth time by getting in his invitation to Nora first.

"I'm awfully sorry, Davy," Nora said consolingly. "But Peter heard of the affair before you did, and he asked me to go with him, so I couldn't very well refuse."

"All right," replied Davy. "I hope you have a good time. But remember, I'm sore."

He cut his visit short because he couldn't keep up his end of the conversation, and Nora's mother remarked that David was getting stupid.

The day and night of the grand ball spread red ink upon the fair annals of Toledo. Everybody was going. The municipal offices were to be emptied, and every official, from the mayor down to the workhouse superintendent, had promised to attend. Even the red-headed mayor's secretary, who never attended anything, had given his word; and when the sun came up on that festival day, all the chivalry and beauty within the city walls began to pile into the wabby street-cars. At noon the Casino grounds were filled, and by night the attendance was dancing around the twelve-thousand mark.

When twelve thousand Toledoans decide to leave town temporarily—and the Casino is out of town—what remains of the city is peculiarly lonely. After Davy Fraser had wiped the lubricating-oil from his ruddy countenance and polished himself back to decency, he emerged from the roundhouse and thought solemn things.

Nora was riding the merry-go-round with Pete. Nora was eating gummed molasses and popcorn with Pete. Nora

was sitting in retired corners, drinking lemonade with Pete. They were shooting the chutes, Pete and Nora; and without a shadow of doubt, Pete had his arm around Nora to prevent her from falling.

Davy had a perfectly fine time with his thoughts until they finally got the better of him; and, like the murderer returning to the scene of the crime, Davy boarded a South Street car and started for the Casino.

A street-car ride frequently clears a man's brain and opens up channels of thought that may otherwise remain clogged. And a ride on a South Street car in Toledo is the longest thing this side of eternity. By the time the motorman had turned into Stickney Avenue, Davy Fraser had ceased to sit on his shoulder-blades like a condemned prisoner. He had taken his hands out of his trousers-pockets, and his face was beginning to flush with a red tint, which, in Davy's case, meant either the presence of an idea or the approach of the measles.

It was an idea.

Why, communicated Davy telepathically to the advertising-signs in the corner of the car, should this ghastly farce be continued longer? Why should he, Davy, who was continually and monotonously bested by a transfer-punching rival, submit to further mortification? Hadn't the thing gone on for months? Hadn't he lost on every occasion? Was he any more likely to win in the future? He was not!

Then, why not end everything immediately? Have it settled and over with, and if things turned out wrong, let 'em turn. If Davy had known what a die was, he would have cast it as the car turned into Lower Summit Avenue.

You approach the Casino grounds through a series of curves, finally stopping at a raised platform, beyond which is a wire netting surrounding a lot of unhappy animals. Davy slid off the car, and paid ten cents to a man at the gate, who seemed to be suffering from an extreme case of ennui.

In ten minutes he had joined the merry throng; in eleven minutes he had begun to search for a tall, handsome girl and a street-car conductor.

They were leaning over the railing, watching the hired motor-boats. Pete was explaining, and Nora was listening. Davy anchored in the offing, sheltered by an ice-cream booth. He meditated upon various things; but uppermost in his mind was the notion to suddenly leap upon the inoffensive Pete and, if possible, kill him with despatch, and throw the body into the water.

Then seize the girl and leave abruptly without being discovered. In the cold light of even Davy's reason, the plan had weak points. Some one would be sure to see him in the thirteen thousand thereabouts, so he paused and bought another ice-cream soda.

Nora and Pete sauntered down the long board walk, followed by the doughty Dave. They halted at various booths, and Davy stopped also, to avoid detection. At one point he approached too closely, and it was only by dodging behind a stall that he escaped as they turned to retrace their steps.

An indignant old lady regarded Davy with a malignant eye, and he had to buy a cane from her before she was convinced that he hadn't meant to snatch the till.

The Casino has many attractions, but the black type in its advertisements always has to do with the steeplechase. This steeplechase renders the words of man feeble and insufficient. It causes press-agents to run loosely to strange adjectives. It is the grand special, the prize feature of the show, and, altogether, the most exciting and indispensable part of the performance.

Four wooden horses slide down four iron-shod rails for all the world like race-horses, and four people ride them. The horse that finishes first wins the race, and its rider receives a free ticket which enables him or her to ride in the next race without the payment of an additional ten cents.

The starting-point is up on the second floor, where the beer is sold in bot-



HE LOWERED HER BETWEEN
THE SINGLE RAILS.

tles, and after a dizzy downward plunge, the racing steeds disappear in a cavern of intense darkness, emerging at the far end of the grounds, and circling around in broad loops until the finish-line is reached.

When ladies ride, it is necessary to cast conventionality to the winds, because if a lady were to ride side-saddle, she would hit the ground on the first turn with a surprising wallop. You ride astride — man, woman, or child — and you clutch your wooden Pegasus with all the strength in your good knees.

So when Davy saw Nora and Pete heading for the steeplechase entrance, he just naturally followed, hoping that something would happen. He sidled along among the rest, buying his ticket mechanically, standing in line, and keep-

ing an eye on a certain ostrich plume in front. Four horses galloped in.

It takes two couples to occupy four horses. Pete led Nora to the waiting horse and helped her gallantly into the saddle, and, if it must be said, Nora fitted into the picture perfectly. Pete hopped nimbly to his horse, and the starter yelled for two more riders. A pale-faced youth clambered upon the horse on the inner rail, leaving a vacant horse between him and Nora.

Davy looked at the empty horse. It looked good. He slipped out of the line and covered ten yards in two seconds.

Nora was surprised. You can't pay attention to emotions on the Casino steeplechase. In a flash she saw that the rider to her left was Davy Fraser. Peter, on the off horse, saw it, too. Then everybody clutched with their arms, wrists, knees, and fingers as the passionless steeds shot down with a metallic roar.

Whether Davy had figured it out beforehand, or whether the inspiration came to him on that first downward dip, is something for historians to puzzle over. The cane he had bought under protest was in his hand, and beside him, hanging on for dear life, was Nora. Somewhere to starboard was the hated Pete, engrossed solely in the business of sticking to a wobbling hobby-horse.

When the four horses, breast to breast, disappeared into the dungeon part of the ride, Davy reached over and laid a detaining hand on the horse beside him—not the horse occupied by the pale-faced youth. He jimmied his cane down between the forelegs of his own steed until it reached the cog rail, and then, using it as a lever and still holding the tail of the horse to his right, he leaned against the cane desperately.

There was a sudden and perceptible diminution of its speed. The wooden skate swayed and bucked. So did the horse beside him. Slowly they drew up side by side, Davy still bent forward upon his trusty cane. The terrific momentum was being overcome. On his fiery steed, Peter was shooting ahead. On the other side of the track, the pale-faced youth had disappeared, leaving only a grating sound in the darkness.

As the two horses slid forward, a voice sounded:

"Is that you, Davy Fraser?"

"Is it me? You're dead right it's me! You hang on tight, and we'll be out of this hole in a minute. Look at the daylight ahead. Don't go and get scared. I'm working this thing."

The steeplechase-course winds around the south end of the Casino grounds, and for a brief space it curves over the fence that encloses the grounds. At the point where the horses cross the top of the fence, Davy gave one last push at his cane, and the two racers stopped.

"Here," said Davy. "We've got twelve seconds before the next bunch smashes into us. You got to jump."

He threw his arm around the girl and lifted her clear of the saddle. Then, with infinite care, he lowered her between the single rails, holding her by the hands, until she hung suspended eight feet from the ground, and then he dropped her.

Nora landed on the grass and crumpled up in a little heap. The cavern behind Davy suddenly began to roar, and he knew that another team of four horses was plunging down upon him. So, without further ado, he dropped his cane and slipped down, head over heels, and on the outside of the fence.

Two stationary wooden horses were plowed up into splinters and rendered useless by the collision that followed. No one was hurt. The riders who followed managed, luckily enough, to stick to their saddles. Below them, Davy was helping Nora to her feet and urging upon her the necessity of getting away before they were arrested for murder.

"D'ye know where we're going?" he asked as they hurried up toward the line of waiting cars. "You don't need to answer. We're going to be married. I'm going to marry you. You're going to marry me."

Nora was making a feminine noise that is either laughing or crying. It depends upon the situation.

"But what about Peter?" she asked.

"Oh, he wins, that's all. He wins the race because we didn't finish. Unless," Davy added as an afterthought, "unless that pale-faced guy beat him out."